SPIRITUAL MESSAGE

For Those who Reason

Let us never negotiate out of fear but never fear to negotiate

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Tolerance! Its Significance Today

On January 1st, 1995, the newspaper flashed the news that "the United Nations has proclaimed 1995 as the "Year of Tolerance," saying that the ability to be tolerant of the actions, beliefs and opinions of others is a major factor in promoting world peace. Amidst the resurgence of ethnic conflicts, discrimination against minorities and xenophobia directed against refugees and asylum-seekers, tolerance is the only way forward, said the statement of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (UNESCO). It is said, racism and religious fanaticism in many countries had led to many forms of discrimination and the intimidation of those who held contrary views. Violence against and intimidation of authors, journalists and others who exercise their freedom of expression, were also on the increase along with political movements which seek to make particular groups responsible for social ills such as crime and unemployment. Intolerance is one of the greatest challenges we face on the threshold to the 21st century said the UNESCO Statement. Intolerance is both an ethnic and political problem. It is a rejection of the differences between individuals and between cultures. When intolerance becomes organised or institutionalised, it destroys democratic principles and poses a threat to world peace. —*The Hindustan Times,* January 1, 1995.

This proclamation of the U.N. is most apt and timely. The prime need of the world today is indeed tolerance.

One of the stark realities of life is that divergence of views does exist between man and man, and that it impinges at all levels. Be it at the level of a family or a society, a community or a country, differences are bound to exist everywhere. Now the question is how best unity can be forged or harmony brought about in the face of human differences.

Some people hold that the removal of all differences is the sine qua-non for bringing about unity. But, this view is untenable, as it is not practicable. You may not like the thorns which essentially accompany roses, but it is not possible for you to pluck out all the thorns and destroy them completely. For, if you pluck out one, another will grow in its place. Even if you run a bulldozer over all rosebushes, new plants will grow in their place which will bear roses ineluctably accompanied by thorns. In the present scheme of things, roses can be had only by tolerating the existence of thorns. Similarly, a peaceful society can be created only by creating and fostering the spirit of tolerance towards diversities. In this world, unity is achievable only by learning to unite in spite of differences, rather than insisting on unity without differences. For total eradication of differences is an impossibility. The secret of attaining peace in life is tolerance of disturbance of the peace.

There is nothing wrong in diversity of opinions. In fact, this is a positive quality which has many advantages. The beauty of the garden of life is enhanced if the flower of unity is accompanied by the thorn of diversity.

An advantage flowing from this attitude is that it builds character. If you are well-mannered towards those whose views are similar to yours, you may be said to exhibit fairly good character. But, if you behave properly with those holding divergent views from you or who criticise you, then you deserve to be credited with having an excellent character.

In the same way, a society whose members hold identical views and never have any controversial discussions, will soon find itself in the doldrums. The intellectual development of the members of this

society will be frozen, because personal evolution takes place only where there is interaction of divergent thinking. So where there is no such interaction, how can there be intellectual development?

The adoption of a policy of tolerance in the face of controversy and opposition is not a negative step. It is undoubtedly a positive course of action.

Divergence of views plays an important role in the development of the human psyche. It is only after running the intellectual gauntlet that a developed personality emerges. If in a human society, this process ceases to operate, the development of character will come to a standstill.

Nobody in this world is perfect. If a man is endowed with some good qualities, he may be lacking others. This is one of the reasons why differences crop up among people. But, for life as a whole, these differences are actually a great blessing: the good points of one man may compensate for the shortcomings of another, just as one set of talents in one man may complement a different set in another. If people could only learn to tolerate others' differences, their very for bearance would become a great enabling factor in collective human development.

The habit of tolerance prevents a man from wasting his time and talent on unnecessary matters. When negatively affected by another's unpalatable behaviour, your mental equilibrium is upset. On the other hand, emotionally untouched by such behaviour, your mind will fully retain its equilibrium and, without wasting a single moment, you will continue to perform your work in the normal way. The policy of tolerance or forbearance enhances your efficacy, while intolerant behaviour reduces it.

Tolerance is not an act of compulsion. It is a positive principle of life, expressing the noble side of a man's character. The existence of tolerant human beings in a society is just like the blooming of flowers in a garden.

The News of the Last Day

A high-intensity earthquake lasting 45 seconds and epicentred at Almora, U.P., rocked northern India at a quarter to twelve, midnight, on October 20, 1991. With the same jolts, which could be felt even as far away as Delhi, hundreds of houses collapsed, about a thousand people were killed and more than three thousand were injured.

Although so devastating in its effects, in comparison with that supreme, world-shaking event, the *Qiamah* (the Day of Resurrection) an earthquake is but a very minor affair. Nevertheless, it gives us an idea of what will happen on that day on a much vaster scale. *The Times of India* of October 21, 1991, reported an incident which took place on that very night which provides a telling parallel. It seems that at 2.30 a.m. just ten minutes before the earthquake began, certain Punjab militants opened fire on the Sirsa (District Bareilly) police station with AK-47 rifles, where the few police personnel on duty at that time were ill-equipped for effective defence.

However, the militants had not reckoned with the forces of nature. Instead of just dealing with a small police post, they now found themselves battling with a vastly superior enemy. Like all the other people in the vicinity they fled in terror, no doubt thinking that the heavens were falling on them.

The helplessness experienced in the face of an earthquake is nothing compared to the state of desperation man will be reduced to on Doomsday. Then he will be confronted with the biggest imaginable earthquake, and will be powerless to control it.

When possessed with power, man tends to become haughty and over-confident. But when the earth is so shaken that the mountains come tumbling down and it is engulfed by the mighty waves of the ocean, he will flee in utter bewilderment, leaving all his possessions behind him. To his horror, he will find that there is no escape route whatsoever.

The Concept of God

We have the entire universe before us. We see it, we experience it, and so are forced to believe in its existence. Even when a man rejects the godhead, he still believes in the universe. But when and how did it come into being? Explaining its existence as the creation of God is no final answer—so it is generally held—since the very next question which arises is if God made the universe, then who made God?

Can we believe in a causeless universe and a causeless God? Belief in a causeless God as the Creator of all things has more logic to it, in this world of cause and effect, than belief in a causeless universe and a non-existent God. It is by believing in a causeless Creator that we save ourselves from believing in the impossibility of a causeless universe.

Belief in God seems to many to be a very strange thing. But disbelief is even stranger. Sometimes it is argued that belief must rest on proof. But, from the purely scientific standpoint, nothing in this world can be proved or disproved. So far as believing in anything is concerned, the option is not between the proved and the unproved, but between the workable and the non-workable.

For instance, scientists in general believe in the concept of gravity. They do so, not because of proof of its existence, but because of the demonstrable predictability of effects. They do not know why gravity has the effect it has, or how it came into existence. They simply accept its existence as a useful theory.

This is the case with all scientific concepts, and belief in them does not mean uncritical acceptance of established as opposed to unestablished ideas. It simply means believing in a working hypothesis as opposed to an unworkable theory. Exactly the same principle is applicable to the concept of God.

In the matter of gravity, the choice for us is not between matter with gravity and matter without gravity, but between matter with gravity and non-existent matter. Since the concept of non-existent matter is untenable, being unworkable, we have opted for matter with gravity. From the purely academic angle, the same is true of the concept of God.

The universe itself does not have the ability to create. It can neither increase nor decrease itself by so much as a particle. As with all other scientific concepts, we must choose not between the universe with God and the universe without God, but between God and a non-existent universe. Since a non-existent universe is inconceivable, we must perforce opt for the concept of the universe with God.

The Problem of Riots

A regular reader of Al-Risala, Mr. M. Sajid of Delhi, once told me in the course of conversation that he agreed with all of the viewpoints expressed in Al-Risala, except for one, and that was holding the Muslims responsible for riots that took place from time to time. He baulked at the idea that Muslims started riots. He felt that this ran counter to the facts.

I explained to him that he must have misconstrued my words. What I actually said was that *Muslims were responsible for not preventing riots from taking place.* In the context of dealing with opponents, the Qur'an says: "If you persevere and guard yourself against evil, their machinations will never harm you" (3:120).

That is, if you remain patient and adopt a God-fearing attitude, the plots of your opponents cannot harm you in any way. This verse tells us that the actual problem is not the existence of plots, but the absence of patience and piety: if riots occur, it is not because of hostile conspiracies, but because of our inability to adopt the path of patience and piety in countering them.

I further explained to him that whether these problems pertained to India or to any other country, there would always be people who indulged in activities which injured others' sentiments. The solution to this problem is not to stop others from indulging in such activities, but to control one's own feelings. Wherever Muslims have fallen a prey to provocation, their reaction has caused matters to escalate into full-scale riots. But where they have adopted the path of patience and avoidance, rioting has been nipped in the bud.

We must fully grasp the fact that the administration is unable to prevent the outbreak of rioting. If riots are to be prevented, it will only be by right action on the part of the Muslims. The only viable strategy for Muslims to adopt is to remain unruffled in the face of provocation, and to exercise patience in the face of unpleasantness. And there is nothing to prevent their seeking police assistance whenever a situation is about to take an ugly turn. This is something which needs to be done at the very outset. If Muslims can accept that this should be their role, the phenomenon of rioting could be banished, once and for all, from this country.

Human Tragedy

The reality of life is sadly reflected in one of the sayings of the Jewish leader, Abba Eban (b. 1915). "Men and nations do the sensible thing only after they have exhausted all other options." (*Liberty's Nation*)

It is true that no individual or group seems willing to act seriously or sensibly unless and until all irrational and superficial options have failed.

Our world is marred by injustice and dishonesty and all kinds of atrocities at both the individual as well as the communal level. This is because people feel free to do as they please quite unfettered by moral considerations. The wrongdoers renounce such ways only when there is no other option. The freedom—which they abuse—has been given to mankind, because our world is a testing place. And on Doomsday,

all without exception will be called to account for how they have used the freedom. If they have ignored and denied the truth in this world, they shall be obliged to accept it on the Day of Reckoning, because all of their options will have run out and subterfuge and pleas for mercy will be of no avail; by that time it will be too late either to beg for forgiveness or to attempt to make amends.

Why do people wait until they are forced to submit to the truth? If one accepts the truth because one is forced to, one's acceptance has no value. Why again do people wait until they are forced to treat others with justice? Being just to others because one is forced to is likewise an action bereft of honour or human kindness.

Why wait until we are on the brink of Doomsday before we act with human concern for individuals and a proper respect for society? Why wait until the Day of Judgement before we act as bidden in the Qur'an, as honest, upright, responsible individuals?

Towards Reconstruction

In his book 'Victory without War', former American President Richard Nixon, commenting on the scene in India, made this observation: "Those who believe India is not governed well should remember how miraculous it is that India is governed at all."

Richard Nixon's remark on the Indian social set-up is no doubt harsh. We would be wise, however, to take this as a challenge rather than just simmer with resentment over it. Instead of venting our anger on Nixon as an unfair critic, we would be well-advised to devote our entire attention to the internal construction of our country. We must struggle to raise our country so high that never again will any Nixon dare pass such remarks against us. Japan could be our model in this matter. At the end of the second world war Japan had reduced itself to insignificance in the eyes of the world. But after a hard struggle lasting forty years it eventually raised itself to such heights that no one now dare cast aspersions on it.

The need of the hour is to give fresh thought to our national problems. Then, without the slightest delay, we must begin our journey in the right direction so that our future may be better and brighter as compared to our present.

A senior Indian journalist, S. Mulgaonkar, had made some very penetrating observations few years ago on the Indian situation in his article entitled 'Can systemic changes provide the entire answer?' (Published in two installments in the *Indian Express* of February 7 and 14, 1987).

He pointed out that forty years had passed since we gained our freedom. We had made progress too in many fields, but our problems were many and serious, and on balance, appeared to outweigh the progress we had made.

Mr Mulgaonkar did not subscribe to the views of those who talked of a change in the system. To him, 'in the final analysis, a system is only as good as those who operate it.'

I entirely agree with Mr Mulgaonkar on this point. I would like to add that it was Mahatma Gandhi who gave our country its political base. Later, when power came into the hands of Pandit Nehru, he gave the country its industrial base.

Now the third urgent task is to provide the country with a moral base. To me, this third base — the moral base — will be the decisive factor in the course which our national life will take. This is a reality admitted by almost every right-thinking person.

The Exploitation of Islam

A *Time* magazine report of February 15, 1993 carrying pictures of Indian Muslims, states that persecution of Indian Muslims by Hindus is due to the latter's hatred for the Muslims on religious grounds. It says: *Hindu hatred for Muslims dates back to the 10th century, when Muslim invaders first began looting the subcontinent and destroying Hindu temples (p. 25).*

The Muslim invaders, the targets of blame over a long period of time, found a powerful defence in the superbly written works of Maulana Shibli Nomani (1857-1914). Popular in British India, his writings set the subsequent trend and Muslim writers and speakers followed in his footsteps. All, without exception, began to defend the Muslim kings.

This style of defence was greatly to the Muslims' liking, but did little to bring about a change in the Hindu mind. On the contrary, there was a hardening of Hindu attitudes which, in terms of religious antipathy, reached its culminating point in the twentieth century. Shibli's approach had clearly been counter-productive. That was because his writings, which should have aimed at putting an end to Hindu hatred, were more calculated to win applause from fellow Muslims.

Now, the need of the hour is for Muslims to change their entire attitude. Rather than defend the Muslim kings, they should admit their mistakes and distance themselves from their wrongdoing. That is, they should cease to associate themselves from any of their deeds which were not carried out in the true spirit of Islam.

Along with our assertion that Islam is the religion of truth, we must also concede the Muslims are quite a different matter. Today, there are many Muslims who exploit their religion for their own personal interests—as indeed happened in the past. Right-thinking Muslims in general should now refuse—be they kings or commoners—to have anything to do with the un-Islamic acts of their forebears.

The Construction of the Mind

One of the important points made in the UNESCO constitution is as follows:
Since war began in the minds of men it is in the mind that the defence of peace must be constructed.

This is an indisputable fact. Whether the quarrel is between two people on the street, or between groups or nations, the origin of all such incidents lies in the mind. It is in the mind that feelings of hatred, revenge and anger are produced, and when these spill over into provocation, the result is some measure of conflict, ranging from petty squabbling to full-scale war.

Largely speaking, negative thoughts arise in reaction to untoward behaviour on the part of others.

Someone insults us and we become angry. An unpleasant situation is created by someone, and we are provoked by this. Someone damages our prestige and we therefore seek revenge. All these vengeful impulses take shape first of all in our minds and when they are externalized, they wreak havoc. If peace could be established at the level of the mind, before there is any physical escalation of strife, the world would be a much better place to live in.

The only effective way to prevent quarrels, whether at the individual or at the national or international level, is to train people's minds: patience should be emphasized as the greatest of all virtues.

Such a mentality can be developed only if negative thinking is replaced by positive thinking. This should be directed at resistance to provocation and the avoidance of all unpleasantness and consequent entanglements. It must provide the basis for cool and unemotional decision-making, and, above all, for return of love for hatred.

Such a reform of the mind would lead to the most positive reconstruction of human affairs ever witnessed in human history.

A Purposeful Creation

Why was this world made? Why was man born into this world? Why, after a certain period of time, does he pass away? What will happen after death? These are the most important questions concerning the origins and fate of mankind, and they should never be far from people's minds. Finding the correct answers to these questions has always been one of man's most important quests.

Pondered over for thousands of years, these questions have been variously answered by different people. However, these answers can be placed in two broad categories: one, which holds the great array of wonders in this world to be purposeless, and the other, which asserts that man was created with a purpose and that he has a definite goal.

While the first view tends to be subscribed to by poets, philosophers and secular scholars, the second view is firmly upheld by that very special class of beings called prophets, or messengers of God. The most authentic testament to the second view has been provided by the Prophet Muhammad.

Many arguments can be put forward in support of the answers in both of these categories. It is very obvious, however, that the notion of purposelessness is not in keeping with the structure of life and universe. The idea, on the other hand, of purposeful creation, falls exactly into place, for the simple reason that it contains no inherent contradictions.

The world into which man is born is fraught with significance. There is nothing which is of a meaningless or random nature. It is quite unthinkable that man, with his meaningful life, born into a meaningful universe, should find no purpose in creation. Where there is meaningfulness, there will, of necessity, be purposefulness. This aspect of the universe is a clear verification of the Prophet's answer.

The Spiritual Goal of Islam

What is the spiritual goal of Islam? That is, what is that spiritual target which Islam sets before man? The answer in the words of the Qur'an is: 'A soul at rest' (89:27). Thus the spiritual goal of Islam is to attain this state of peace in the soul.

According to the Qur'an this is the ultimate stage in a man's spiritual development. When he reaches this stage of progress, he qualifies himself to be ushered into Paradise, the perfect and eternal world of the Hereafter. The Qur'an addresses such souls in these words: 'O serene soul! Return to your Lord joyful, and pleasing in His sight. Join My servants and enter My paradise' (89:27-30).

In this world man has to lead his life in circumstances in which he experiences various kinds of situations: there are times of gain, times of loss; times of happiness and times of grief. Sometimes he receives good treatment at the hands of others, at other times his fate is quite otherwise.

The ideal human being of the Qur'an is one who undergoes all these experiences without losing his integrity. Under no circumstances is his inner peace disturbed. However untoward the occasion, he can maintain his natural balance. Success does not make him proud. Power does not make him haughty. No bad treatment by others drives him to seek vengeance in anger. At all events, he remains serene. It is such a man who is called 'a peaceful soul' in the Qur'an. And it is this man who, according to the Qur'an, has achieved the highest spiritual state.

The realization of God joins man to his Maker. Such communion with the divine brings about a state of spiritual elevation. Having been thus raised to a higher plane of existence, man becomes a 'sublime character,' (68:4) as it is expressed in the Qur'an.

This can be illustrated by an example from the natural world: The process of conversion of a substance from the solid to the gaseous state, is called boiling. The boiling point of a liquid varies according to atmospheric pressure. At sea level, water boils at 100 degrees centigrade. At a higher altitude, as on a mountain, the atmospheric pressure is less, so the boiling point is lower. This shows that it is the altitude that makes the difference.

The law of nature governing this world accounts for the difference made by altitude. Islam's aim is to foster human beings whose altitude has changed. The superior qualities desired in him will come later, on their own.

Just as the Prophet of Islam was God's messenger, so also was he a perfect example of the peaceful soul. By studying his life, one can learn the nature of God's ideal man, that is, a peaceful soul. In the Qur'an the Prophet Muhammad is described as an example of "sublime character" (68:4).

When is it that a man's spiritual progress brings him to the state of peace? The best way to describe the soul being at complete rest is to give certain examples from the life of the Prophet of Islam.

The Prophet's name was Muhammad, meaning the praised one or the praiseworthy. But when the Makkans became his most dire opponents, they themselves coined a name for the Prophet, '*Muzammam*,' on the pattern of '*Muhammad*,' *Muzammam* meaning condemned. They used to heap abuses on him calling him by this epithet of *Muzammam*. But the Prophet was never enraged at this distorted version of his name. All he said in return was: "Aren't you surprised that God has turned away the abuses of the Quraysh from me. They abuse a person by the name of *Muzammam*. Whereas I am *Muhammad* (Ibn Hisham, 1/379).

This meant that abuses were being heaped on a person whose name was Muzammam. Since the Prophet's name was Muhammad, not Muzammam, their abuses did not apply to him. Such a reaction can come only from a person whose intellectual level is very high; who can rise above praise and criticism.

One day the Prophet was sitting with his companions in Madinah when a funeral procession passed by. The Prophet stood up. His Companions pointed out that it was the funeral of a Jew, that is, a non-Muslim. The Prophet replied: 'Was he not a human being?' (*Fathul Bari,* 3/214).

This incident shows that the Prophet was looking at the matter by separating two different aspects of the Jew, that is, his being non-Muslim, and his being a human being. At that moment he overlooked his non-Muslim identity and saw him simply as a human being.

It is only a man who, in the words of the Qur'an has acquired a sublime character who can show such respect for every human being. It is only one whose spiritual progress has elevated his mental level who can do honour to one of another creed.

On another occasion the Prophet of Islam was in the Masjid al-Nabi in Madinah, the second most sacred mosque in Islam, when a Bedouin, that is, a desert Arab, entered the mosque and urinated inside it. It was obviously a very provocative matter. But the Prophet was not at all provoked. After the nomad had urinated, the Prophet simply asked his companions to bring a bucket of water and wash the place clean (*Fathul Bari,* 1/386).

This is a clear example of the kind of behaviour one may expect of a man with a peaceful soul. The Prophet's keeping cool at such obvious provocation was possible only because he had attained the highest state of spirituality. He had risen above all negative feelings.

These examples make it clear what a peaceful soul is. The peaceful soul is one which being on a higher spiritual plane, can live in tranquillity, regardless of the circumstances. It subsists within its own self. No external event can disturb its inner peace.

Nowadays people often tend to look at the history of kings in order to understand Islam. But this is not the proper way to study it. One needs only to study the careers of today's political leaders to be able to understand the nature of the Muslim kings of bygone days. Today's political leaders are, in reality, exploiters. In a similar way most of the Muslim kings of the later phase of Islam were also exploiters. To achieve their political ends, they exploited the name of Islam. As such, these Muslim kings were in no way the true representatives of Islam.

Seeking the Pleasure of God

According to the Qur'an and the Hadith, a good deed is one which is essentially intended to seek the pleasure of God (57:27). Devoid of this spirit, any deed will be as good as worthless when the final reckoning comes.

God does not go by appearances. He sees the inner motive called 'intent' in the Shariah. Looked at from this angle, deeds could be of two kinds, those that are committed to seek the pleasure of God, and those aimed at pleasing human beings.

The focal point of the man whose aim is to seek the pleasure of God will be his Creator. He seeks to

find out whether or not his actions will meet with the approval of his Lord. His dealings are always determined by the principle of truth. His speech and movements are always directed by the will of God. Even if all other human beings have turned against him, or he is shunned by them, he is not deterred from following the path of truth.

On the contrary, the focus of attention of the man, whose aim is to please human beings, is man instead of God. He looks up to his group, his party and his human patrons in all matters. His language is couched in such terms as to please men, and his actions are calculated to win popularity among human beings.

However, the individual whose aim is to seek the pleasure of God becomes sensitive in the highest degree to all matters relating to God. He can ignore anything but divine dictates, whereas those who seek the pleasure of men become extemely sensitive in matters relating to men. They begin to show such consideration to men as only God deserves.

The former will find their abode in heaven, while the latter will be consigned to hellfire.

Liberalism and Fundamentalism

I should like, first of all, to define the terms liberalism and fundamentalism. To arrive at universally acceptable definition has never been an easy task, but I think that good, workable definition of liberalism and fundamentalism should be, respectively, reason-based thinking, as opposed to scripture-based thinking.

Once we accept these definitions, we have a set of criteria by which to judge the actions of both liberals and fundamentalists. However, what we find, in the light of these criteria, is that neither group has truly adhered to its professed doctrines. Neither have the liberals been guided by reason, nor have the fundamentalists been by the scriptures.

In the Indian context, the Shah Bano case provides a telling example by which to judge the validity of the respective stands adopted by these two groups. During this case, such emphasis was laid on the fact that, according to the Islamic Shariah, a divorced wife was entitled only to temporary provision by her husband; she did not have the right to ask for permanent maintenance. This point was seized upon and highlighted by the liberals in order to prove that Islamic Law was in need of revision, without which it was not practicable in modern times.

To my way of thinking, in this case, the liberals neither thought nor acted reasonably. Had reason been appealed to, the liberals ought surely to have accepted the reality of the western world having already tried—and found wanting—the system of permanent maintenance for a divorced wife. Western laws, in obliging the ex-husband to pay permanent maintenance to his ex-wife, placed the man at an irreversible disadvantage. It is hardly surprising then that divorce having proved so costly time and again, attitudes to marriage began to change. As a result, more than fifty per cent of the young couples living together today are unwed, so that when they separate, the man does not have to pay for the maintenance of his former partner. Seen in the light of reason, the option, in reality, is not between permanent or temporary maintenance, but between any kind of provision and complete sexual anarchy. This being the reality, is it proper for liberals to ignore the experience of the west and blindly ridicule Islamic Law? The adoption of such a stance runs counter both to reason and to religion.

The position adopted by the fundamentalists in the Shah Bano case was flared in much the same manner as that of the liberals, in that it did not derive from or conform to the principles propounded by them. When the verdict in favour of maintenance was given, Muslim fundamentalists raised a great hue and cry against the Supreme Court's decision, completely ignoring the fact that to do so was quite against the teachings of the Qur'an.

Consider the almost parallel case which took place in Madinah during the lifetime of the Prophet. A Muslim, called Basheer, who once had a dispute with a Jew, could have referred his case to the Prophet and been given a verdict based on the Shari'ah. But he chose, instead, to take his problems to a Jew by the name of Kaab Bin Ashraf, who used to settle any disputes referred to him. The Qur'an comments on this incident, but has nothing to say against Kaab Bin Ashraf. On the contrary, the Qur'an only condemned the Muslim for taking his case to this Jew instead of the Prophet. That is to say that the scriptures condemned the verdict-seeker rather than the verdict-giver.

Nothwithstanding this Qur'anic example, the Muslim fundamentalists of India, without exception, kept silent on the subject of the verdict-seeker. Their entire animus was directed against the Supreme Court, in so doing, the Muslim fundamentalists were following, not their Scriptures, but personal whims.

According to the Qur'an (46:4), there are two sources of knowledge, one established, the other revealed. It would be correct to say that, in principle, the liberal group bases its judgement in established knowledge, while the fundamentalist group stands by revealed knowledge. But if the fundamentalists had genuinely adhered to the Scriptures, they would have diverted their campaign against the verdict-seeker rather than against the verdict-giver (i.e., the Court). Similarly, if the liberals had been true to their own professed doctrines, they would, as a matter of principle, have admitted the veracity of Islamic Law in this particular instance, rather than get about discrediting Islam.

Discovery of God

When persecution at the hands of the Quraysh became insufferable, the Prophet asked some of his Muslim followers to emigrate from Makkah to Abyssinia. There, they were given refuge and found peace and security. When the Quraysh heard about this, they sent two envoys to the king of Abyssinia to demand that the Muslims be returned to them. Najashi, the Abyssinian king, refused to give up those who had sought his protection until they had been allowed to explain their case. Ja'far ibn Abu Talib came forward on behalf of the Muslims: This is what he said: "We used to be an ignorant people, worshipping idols, eating carrion-flesh, committing indecencies, cutting off relationships, and neglecting our neighbours. The strong amongst us used to devour the weak. We remained in this state until God sent us a prophet from our own people: one whose lineage, truthfulness, integrity and chastity were known to us. He called us to One God, urging us to worship Him alone, and to forsake the stones and idols which we and our forefathers had worshipped besides Him. He enjoined us to be truthful and trustworthy; to be kind to relatives and neighbours; to refrain from that which is forbidden to us, and not to spill the blood of others. He forbade indecency and all falsehood, the misappropriation of the property of orphans and the defamation of honourable women. He called on us to worship one God, and no other besides Him. He commanded us

to pray, pay the poor-due and fast. (Ja'far then listed all the commandments of Islam). So we believe in him, and follow him in the religion that has come to him from God. We started worshipping One God alone, refraining from that which he forbade us, and considering lawful only that which he declared so. But our people turned against us, persecuting us and seeking to entice us away from our religion, and turn us back to worshipping idols instead of God Almighty. They attempted to make us indulge once again in impure things, as we used to. When this persecution and oppression became unbearable, and they came between us and our religion, we emigrated to your land. We preferred you above all others, noble king, and sought your refuge, in the hope that we would not be wronged in your presence.

Najashi then asked Ja'far to read to him some of the Book which had been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Ja'far recited the beginning of the Surah entitled 'Mary'. When Najashi heard these verses, he wept. " This is the same word that Jesus brought to the world," he said; "it emanates from the same source." He then sent the envoys of the Quraysh away, saying that there was no question of his handing over the Muslims to them.

From Ja'far's words we can tell what a momentous impact the discovery of God had made on his life, and how his faith had permeated every corner of his being. When Najashi heard this faith expressed in Ja'far's words, he could not but accede under its impact.

The truth is that with the discovery of God, a new personality grows which is reflected in every action. Religion becomes inseparable from the person it has entered. The full force of his faith is borne out by his every word and action. They are outward expression of the deep faith that has saturated his inner soul.

Distinctive Quality

Islam, being a preserved religion, possesses the distinctive quality of being in perfect accord with human reason and human nature. No level of rational thinking and academic progress clashes with Islam. That is to say, at no stage do Islam and reason contradict one another. No believer is faced with the problem of accepting religious dogmas at the expense of science and reason.

Acknowledging this characteristics of Islam, George Bernard Shaw writes:

When the Mahommedan reformation took place, its followers with the enormous advantage of having the only established religion in the world, in whose articles of faith, any intelligent and educated person could believe.

It is due to this special characteristic of Islam that people have been regularly embracing Islam before as well as after the age of science. The modern educated mind finds no difficulty in accepting Islam. That is, the potential convert is not confronted with the difficult question of having to make a choice between Islam and reason. That is, he will not have to divide his mind into the artificial compartment, one for religion and one for science.

What George Bernard Shaw has termed an enormous advantage for the Muslims of the first phase, exists equally for the believers of today. But it is not being availed of. The only obstacle to this path is the general ill-will existing at present between the *da'i* (preacher) and the *mad'u*. Once this obstacle is removed, nothing can stop Islam from entering human settlements with the force of a mighty flood.

World Religions and the Spirit of Tolerance

In its declaration the United Nations held the year 1995 as the year of tolerance. Tolerance is a permanent human requirement.

All the great religions of the world can be broadly divided into two categories: Aryan religions and Semitic religions. So far as I have studied I have found that tolerance has been given equal importance in both these types of religions. Religion makes a man a spiritually developed human being. One who has elevated his spirituality can not afford intolerance. The behaviour of a truly religious person is always one of tolerance.

So far as I have studied the difference between the two types of religions is that of rationale of tolerance instead of tolerance itself. The philosophic ground of tolerance in the Aryan religions is derived from their belief that truth is an all-pervading reality. According to this concept, the psychology of a religious person is that 'If I am in the right, you too, according to your own tradition are in the right." That is to say, tolerance in Aryan religions is based on the concept of manyness of reality.

The philosophic base of tolerance in Semitic religions is different from this, as these religions believe in the principle of oneness of reality. However, so far as the question of human respect is concerned, Semitic religions lay equal emphasis on this value. That is to say, the difference in this respect in both the branches of religions is one of philosophy not of practice.

To put it differently the basis of tolerance in Aryan religions is on mutual recognition, while its basis in Semitic religions is on mutual respect. This difference is only one of philosophic explanation. So far as practical behaviour is concerned, there is no difference in either religions in this respect.

To sum it up, the spirit of tolerance is the essence of all religions. The man produced by religion can never be divested of the spirit of tolerance. Intolerance appears to be directed at others, but it is akin to killing man's own religious personality. Then how can a sincere person be willing to kill himself by his own hands.

Patience: The Superior Solution

Patience, the focus of about 200 verses of the Qur'an, and referred to indirectly in many others, may be termed the core subject of the scriptures.

The verses directly relating to patience are quite explicit in their content. For instance,

And seek (Allah's) help with patience and prayer. (2:45)
And endure patiently whatever may befall thee. (31:17)
And exhort one another to be patient. (103:3)
And heed not their annoyance, but put thy trust in Allah. (33:48)

A very pronounced and direct instruction to behave with patience and endurance is apparent in these verses.

The majority of the other verses are also intensely concerned with patience. The very first verse of the Qur'an begins with "Praise belongs to Allah." (al-Fatihah) This shows that Allah expects mankind to

express its gratitude and admiration to Him. But this is a very trying expectation! We know that this world is full of unpleasant experiences and nobody can be insulated from them. According to the Qur'an "Man is born in toil." Indeed, it is not possible for anyone to create a life of absolute bliss for himself.

How then a person can become grateful and appreciative of Allah's grace in the real sense? The only way to be so is through patience. It is only when a man patiently endures worldly problems that it is possible for him to express his feeling of gratefulness to Allah. It is for this reason that the Qur'an associates gratefulness with patience. (31:31)

Patience makes a person capable of finding a positive and successful solution to any problem. When someone explodes with anger while facing his adversary, he loses the faculty to respond effectively or to think of well-planned action. But when he applies patience and tolerance, he finds himself competent to make a rational move instead of an impulsive reaction. History testifies that one who acts on impulses and emotional reactions, invariably fails; and one who responds rationally, always succeeds.

Patience is undoubtedly the superior solution to all problems. (5.SS/9.95)

Islamic Culture

The Qur'an addresses God as "Lord of the Universe." It does not mention Him as "Lord of the nation." This shows that Islam believes in unbounded universality and not in limitation. It is the same Qur'an which hails the Prophet as a "Blessing for the World" and not as "trouble for the world." This demonstrates that Islam is the religion not of hatred but of love. Again the Qur'an proclaims: "Peace is good." It does not say, "War is good." This means that Islam wishes to create an atmosphere of peace and conciliation and does not condone war and confrontation.

The Qur'an commands "Read!" It does not say "Shoot!" This reveals that Islam is the culture of knowledge and not the culture of the gun. The Qur'an stresses tolerance; it does not preach intolerance. This signifies that Islam implores us to endure the pains inflicted by others instead of reacting impulsively and entering conflict. The Qur'an praises a magnanimous outlook, not the attitude of tit-for-tat. This implies that Islam expects a sublime disposition toward others, which overlooks and ignores their faults.

These few references give an idea of what Islam is and what Islamic culture stands for. Islam is the exposure of the divine existence of God. It is the religion of the whole universe. It represents an exalted humanity. A correct interpretation of Islam is that which agrees with these precepts: anything contradicting these values can never explain Islam.

The real Islam is that which inculcates the fear of God in the people, which diverts their attention from this world to the Hereafter, which fills the people's hearts with love for mankind, which generates the feeling of being well-disposed towards all without any discrimination and which, in its fold, teaches one to become more particular about his duties than his rights.

Those whose hearts are enlightened by Islam become the embodiment of compassion, seeking the welfare only of others. Hatred and hostility cannot be fused with Islam and Islamic culture. (7.SS/9.95)

Editor's Note

With great pleasure we present in this issue another book **"The Qur'an - An Abiding Wonder"** in serials by **Maulana Wahiduddin Khan**

It's contents are :-

Foreword

One: Arguments of the Qur'an

1. The Qur'an: the Book of God
2. The Qur'an: the Prophet's Miracle
3. The Qur'an: the Voice of God

Two: The Safeguarding of the Qur'an

1. The Preservation of the Qur'an
2. Divine Arrangement

Eternal Truth

The Qur'an

An Abiding Wonder

A book by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in serials.

Foreword

This collection briefly discusses two aspects of the Qur'an: firstly, its being in itself a proof that it is the Book of God; secondly its complete preservation in its original form, as revealed to the Arab Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century Hijrah.

Many revelations had been made by God and committed to writing by His devotees before the advent of the Qur'an. Then what particularly distinguishes the sacred Islamic text from its forerunners? It is not just that it is complete and the other revealed books incomplete. To categorise the sacred scriptures in this way would amount to discriminating between the Prophets themselves which is certainly not right.

What then is its great distinguishing feature? There is only one. A simple, but a major one. The text of the Qur'an has never been tampered with, whereas all the other Books have long ago lost their original form and content, which has meant a serious loss of authenticity. It is this characteristic of the Qur'an - its perfect state of preservation - which singles it out from its predecessors as a unique vehicle for divine guidance and salvation, one which will retain its validity until Doomsday.

The preservation of the Qur'an was a laborious task requiring remarkable skill and dedication. As such, it was the most extraordinary undertaking of the age. This feat gains in importance when seen in the context of the loss of authority of previous texts which were not maintained in their pristine state. The Qur'an alone has survived as the completely preserved utterances of the Almighty.

God has absolute power over all things. If He has given man freedom throughout his lifespan in this world, it is purely in order to test him. So that if man made interpolations in, and even destroyed divine scriptures, it was because he chose to misuse this freedom. Finally, as an exceptional blessing to man, God made arrangements to preserve His guidance for future generations. That is how - by the special succour of God - the Prophet and his companions were victorious in their long tussle with the transgressors, thus ushering in a new era in world history.

They succeeded in replacing the old world with a new world which, with its unassailable fidelity to truth, afforded an eternal guarantee for the preservation of the Qur'an.

Wahiduddin Khan

The Qur'an
An Abiding Wonder

Chapter One
The Qur'an: The Book of God

When the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) claimed that the Qur'an was a divine book revealed to him by God for the guidance of man, there were many who did not believe him. The scriptures to them were a human rather than a divine composition. The Qur'an then gave a challenge to these sceptics, asking them to produce "a scripture similar to it," if what they said were true. (52:34).

It declared, moreover, in no uncertain terms that, even if all the human beings and the jinns made collective and concerted efforts to produce a book like the Qur'an, they would all fail miserably in their attempt. (17:88).

The Qur'an, being an eternal book, poses a perennial challenge, addressed to every human being under the sun until Doomsday.

Now the question arises as to the characteristics this sacred book possesses which render it inimitable. Several aspects of its uniqueness are mentioned in the Qur'an, one of which is its consistency:

"Do they not ponder over the Qur'an? If it had not come from God, they would have found in it many contradictions *(ikhtilaf)* " (4:82)

(Professor Arberry has translated the Arabic word *ikhtilaf* as 'inconsistency'. Other renderings of the word include contradiction, disparity and difference.)

Total consistency is an extremely rare quality, one which is an exclusive attribute of God. It is, therefore, beyond any human being to compose a work in which there are no disparities. For a work to be quite flawless, the composer has to have a command of such knowledge as encompasses the past and the future, and extends also to all objects of creation. There must be no shadow of doubt in his perception of the essential nature of things. Furthermore, his knowledge must be based on direct acquaintance, not on information indirectly received from others. And there is another unique quality he must possess: he must be able to see things, not in prejudiced light, but as they actually are.

God and God alone can possess all these extraordinary qualities. For this reason, only His Word will remain perennially free of all inconsistency. The work of man, on the other hand, is always marred by imperfection, for man himself is imperfect; it does not lie within his power to compose a work free of contradiction.

Contradictions in Human Reasoning

It is not by chance that the work of man is fraught with contradictions. It is inevitable, given the inherent limitations of human cerebral activity. Such is the nature of creation that it accepts only the Thought of its Creator. Any theory which is not in consonance with His thinking can find no place in the universe. It will contradict itself, for it stands at variance with the universe at large; it will be inconsistent, for it does not run true to the pattern of nature.

For this reason, intellectual inconsistency is bound to mar any theory conceived of by man. We shall illustrate this point by several examples.

Darwinism

Charles Darwin (1809-1882), and other scientists after him, developed the theory of Evolution from their observations of living creatures. They saw that the various forms of life found on earth outwardly appeared different from one another. Yet, biologically, they bore a considerable resemblance to each other. The structure of a horse, for instance, when standing up on its two hind legs, was not unlike the human frame.

From these observations they came to the conclusion that man was not a separate species, and that along with other animals, he had originated from a common gene. All creatures were involved in a great evolutionary journey through successive stages of biological development. While reptiles, quadrupeds and monkeys were in an early stage of evolution, man was in an advanced stage.

For a hundred years this theory held sway over human thought. But then further investigations revealed that it had loopholes. It did not fully fit in with the framework of creation. In certain fundamental ways, it clashed with the order of the universe as a whole. For instance, there is the question of the age of the earth. By scientific calculation, it has been put at around two thousand million years old. Now this period is far too short to have accommodated the process of evolution envisaged by Darwin. It has been shown scientifically that for just one compound of protein molecule to have evolved, it would have taken more than just millions and millions of years. There are over a million different forms of animal life on earth and at least two hundred thousand fully-developed vegetable species. How could they all have evolved in just two thousand million years? Not even an animal low down in the evolutionary scale could have developed in that time, let alone man, an advanced life-form which could have developed only after passing through countless evolutionary stages.

A mathematician, by the name of Professor Patau, has made certain calculations concerning the biological changes postulated by the theory of evolution. According to him, even a minor change in any species would take one million generations to be completed. From this, one can have an idea of how long a period would elapse before a dog, for example, turned into a horse. The multiple changes involved in such a complicated evolutionary process would have taken much too long for them to have happened during the human lifespan of the world.

As Fred Hoyle puts it, in *The Intelligent Universe:* 'Just how excruciatingly slow genetic information accumulates by trial and error can be seen from a simple example. Suppose, very conservatively, that a particular protein is coded by a tiny segment in the DNA blueprint, just ten of the chemical links in its double

helix. Without all ten links being in the correct sequence, the protein from the DNA doesn't work. Starting with all the ten wrong, how many generations of copying must elapse before all the links - and hence the protein - come right through random errors? The answer is easily calculated from the rate at which DNA links are miscopied, a figure which has been established by experiment.

'To obtain the correct sequence of ten links, by miscopying, the DNA would have to reproduce itself on an average, about a hundred million members of the species all producing offspring, it would still take a million generations before even a single member came up with the required rearrangement. And if that sounds almost within the bounds of possibility, consider what happens if a protein is more complicated and the number of DNA links needed to code for it jumps from ten to twenty. A thousand billion generations would then be needed, and if one hundred links are required (as is often the case), the number of generations would be impossibly high because no organism reproduces fast enough to achieve this. The situation for the neo-Darwinism theory is evidently hopeless. It might be possible for genes to be modified slightly during the course of evolution, but the evolution of specific sequences of DNA links of any appreciable length is clearly not possible' (p. 110)

And in any case, as Hoyle had earlier stated, 'Shufflings of the DNA code are disadvantageous, because they tend to destroy cosmic genetic information rather than to improve it,'

To solve this problem, another theory, called the Pansperimia Theory, was formed. It held that life originated in outer space. From there it came to earth. But as it turned out, this theory created new problems of its own. Where in the vastness of space was there a planet or a star with the conditions needed for life to develop? For example, there is nothing more essential to life than water. Nothing can come into existence or continue to survive without it. Yet no one knows of anywhere in the entire universe, except the earth, where it exists. We then had a certain body of intellectuals who favoured a theory of Emergent Evolution, according to which life - or its various forms - came into being all of a sudden. But this theory is empty of meaning. How can there be sudden appearance of life without the intervention of an outside force? So we are back to where we started, with the Outside Force - or Creator - to discount which all these theories were originally invented.

The fact of the matter is, without taking a Creator into account, one cannot give a valid explanation of life. There is simply no other theory which fits in with the pattern of the universe. Being inconsistent with the nature of life, other theories fail to take firm root. It is indeed significant that eminent scholars from various fields have thought fit to contribute to an Encyclopaedia of Ignorance, which has been published in London. The book has the following introduction:

'In the *Encyclopaedia of Ignorance* some 60 wellknown scientists survey different fields of research, trying to point out significant gaps in our knowledge of the world.'

What this work really amounts to is an academic acknowledgement of the fact that the Maker of the world has fashioned it in such a way that it just cannot be explained by any mechanical interpretation. For instance, as John Maynard Smith has written, the theory of evolution is beset with certain 'built-in' problems. There appears to be no solution to these problems, for all we have to go by are theories. And without concrete evidence, there is no way we can back up our theories.

According to the Qur'an man and all other forms of life have been created by God. The theory of evolution, on the other hand, holds that they are all the result of a blind mechanical process. The Qur'anic interpretation explains itself, for God can do as He wills. He can create what He wishes without material resources. Such is not the case with the theory of evolution, which demands that there should be a cause for everything that happens. Such causes cannot be found, with the result that the theory of evolution is left without an explanation, - in an intellectual vacuum, one might say, while the same cannot be said of the explanation of life offered by the Qur'an.

Political Philosophy

The same is true of political philosophy. According to the 1984 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica:* 'Political philosophy and political conflict have evolved basically around who should have power over whom.' (14/697).

For five thousand years, eminent human brains have addressed their efforts toward finding an answer to this question. Yet they still have not been able to produce what Spinoza termed a 'scientific base' on which to form a coherent political philosophy.

Altogether, there are more than twelve schools of political thought, which fall into two broad categories: despotism and democracy. The first is strongly objected to on the grounds that no good reason can be found for one single individual to tyrannise the entire population of a country or countries. Although democracy, as opposed to despotism, has wide popular support, it has not provided fool proof solutions either to philosophical or practical problems. The literal meaning of democracy - a word of Greek origin - is rule by the people. This notion has been widely hailed as a panacea of all ills, but, in practice, it has proved impossible to establish rule by the entire population of any given country. If all of the people are to govern, how can they - at the same time - be governed? If all the people cannot have power simultaneously, how can a popular government be formed? Various theories have been propounded, the most popular of which is Rousseau's, i.e. that it should be left to the General Will, which can be determind by plebiscite. But, this being a time-consuming and cumbersome process (not to speak the expense involved), government by the people becomes, in effect, government by a few elected individuals. People may be free to vote as they please, but after they have voted, they are once again subjected to the rule of a select group. Democratically elected rulers over the world are now seen to assume the same role as the monarchs of former times.

The notion of freedom is traditionally associated with democracy, but there, too, as a political system it does not necessarily make people more liberated than they were under overtly oppressive regimes. Although the entire basis of democracy is the belief that people are born equal, with equal rights and that they are free, Rousseau expresses the more immediate reality with the very first lines of his Social Contract, "Man was born free and everywhere he is in chains." Then, too, there is man's very nature to be considered. He is a social animal. Far from being an independent entity in this world with the liberty to live as he please, he is an integral part of the corpus of society. Another philosopher goes so far as to say that "man is not born free. Man is born into society which imposes restraints on him."

Clearly, democracy, although in large measure an improvement on despotism, does not automatically provide the key to solving the problems of restricted individual liberty and social inequality. Often, in the name

of democracy, a dynastic monarchy is supplanted by an elective oligarchy, leaving the individual still feeling that he is no more than a pawn in the struggle for power. In the 18th and 19th centuries, people rose in rebellion against monarchical systems of government, but, once free of the yoke of kingly rule, they had to resign themselves to rule by an elite group calling themeslves 'representatives of the people' - which did not seem much of an improvement on life under the old monarchs, who had laid claim to being 'representatives of God on earth.'

All political philosophers have been caught up in contradictions of this nature. And there appears no way out of the impasse. Even the so-called "representation' of the people is open to question. Take the example of the British conservatives who, in one year, won a decisive victory, winning an overall majority of 144 seats. In terms of votes, however, the conservative share of the vote (43%) had fallen since 1979, i.e. as far as seats were concerned the conservatives had won a massive overall majority. But, as far as votes were concerned, they could muster only 43%. Could this be said to be truly representative of the people? Man's failure in this field has been summed up in these words: 'The history of political philosophy from Plato until the present day makes it plain that modern political philosophy is still faced with the basic problems.

In fact, there is only one political philosophy that does not contradict itself, and that is the philosophy put forward by the Qur'an. The Qur'an says, that only God has right to rule over man: "Have we any say in the matter?" they ask. Say to them: "All is in the hands of God,"'(3:154).

The idea of God as Sovereign makes for a coherent system of thought, free from all forms of contradiction. But when man is considered sovereign, there are bound to be contradictins and inconsistencies in the political theories that evolve. The aim of all political theories has been to eradicate the divisions between ruler and subjects. Yet no human system, whatever its natre, has been able to do this. In both the democratic and totalitarian systems, human equality has remained an unattainable ideal, for power has always had to be put in the hands of a few individuals, with others becoming their subjects. This disparity can only disappear when God is considered Sovereign. Then the only difference that remains is between God and man. He is the Ruler, all are His subjects. All men are equal before Him. There is no division and no distinction, between man and man.

(123) and remain conscious of [the coming of] a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall ransom be accepted from any of them, nor shall intercession be of any use to them, and none shall be succoured.[99]

(124) And [remember this:] when his Sustainer tried Abraham by [His] commandments and the latter fulfilled them,[100] He said: "Behold, I shall make thee a leader of men." Abraham asked: "And [wilt Thou make leaders] of my offspring as well?" [God] answered: "My covenant does not embrace the evildoers."[101]

(125) AND LO! We made the Temple a goal to which people might repair again and again, and a sanctuary:[102] take. then, the place whereon Abraham once stood as your place of prayer.[103] And thus did We command Abraham and Ishmael: "Purify My Temple for those who will walk around it,[104]and those who will abide near it in meditation, and those who will bow down and prostrate themselves [in prayer]."

(126) And, lo, Abraham prayed: "O my Sustainer! Make this a land secure, and grant its people fruitful sustenanace - such of them as believe in God and the Last Day."
[God] answered: "And whoever shall deny the truth, him will I let enjoy himself for a short while - but in the end I shall drive him to suffering through fire: and how vile a journey's end!"

(127) And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the Temple, [they prayed:] "O our Sustainer! Accept Thou this from us: for, verily, Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing!

(128) "O our Sustainer! Make us surrender ourselves unto Thee, and make out of our offspring[105] a community that shall surrender itself unto Thee, and show us our ways of worship, and accept our repentance: for, verily, Thou alone art the Acceptor of Repentance, the Dispenser of Grace!

(129) "O our Sustainer! Raise up from the midst of our offspring[106] an apostle from among themselves, who shall convey unto them Thy messages, and impart unto them revelation as well as wisdom, and cause them to grow in purity: for, verily, Thou alone art almighty, truly wise!"

(130) And who, unless he be weak of mind, would want to abandon Abraham's creed, seeing that We have indeed raised him high in this world, and that, verily, in the life to come he shall be among the righteous?

(131) When his Sustainer said to him, "Surrender thyself unto Me!" -he answered, "I have surrendered myself unto [Thee,] the Sustainer of all the worlds."

(132) And this very thing did Abraham bequeath unto his children, and [so did] Jacob: "O my children! Behold, God has granted you the purest faith; so do not allow death to overtake you ere you have surrendered yourselves unto Him."

(133) Nay, but you [yourselves, O children of Israel,] bear witness[107] that when death was approaching Jacob, he said unto his sons: "Whom will you worship after I am gone?" They answered: "We will worship thy God, the God of thy forefathers Abraham and Ishmael[108] and Isaac, the One God; and unto Him will we surrender ourselves."

(134) Now those people have passed away; unto them shall be accounted what they have earned, and unto you, what you have earned; and you will not be judged on the strength of what they did.[109]

(135) AND THEY say, "Be Jews" -or, "Christians" - "and you shall be on the right path." Say: "Nay, but [ours is] the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false,[110] and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God."

(136) Say: "We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, [111] and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. [112] And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves."

(137) And if [others] come to believe in the way you believe, they will indeed find themselves on the right path; and if they turn away, it is but they who will be deeply in the wrong, and God will protect thee from them: for He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing.

(138) [Say: "Our life takes its] hue from God! And who could give a better hue [to life] than God, if we but truly worship Him?"

(139) Say [to the Jews and the Christians]: "Do you argue with us about God?[113] But He is our Sustainer as well as your Sustainer - and unto us shall be accounted our deeds, and unto you, your deeds; and it is unto Him alone that we devote ourselves.

(140) "Do you claim that Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants were 'Jews' or 'Christians'?"[114] Say: "Do you know more than God does? And who could be more wicked than he who suppresses a testimony given to him by God?[115] Yet God is not unmindful of what you do.

(141) "Now those people have passed away: unto them shall be accounted what they have earned, and unto you, what you have earned; and you will not be judged on the strength of what they did."

(142) THE WEAK-MINDED among people will say, "What has turned them away from the direction of prayer which they have hiterto observed ?"[116]
Say: "God's is the east and the west; He guides whom He wills onto a straight way." [117]

(143) And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, [118] so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you.[119]
And it is only to the end that We might make a clear distinction between those who follow the Aposltle and those who turn about on their heels that We have appointed [for this community] the direction of prayer which thou [O Prophet] hast formerly observed: for this was indeed a hard test for all but those whom God has guided aright. [120] But God will surely not lose sight of your faith - for, behold, God is most compassionate towards man, a dispenser of grace.

(99) See 2 : 48. In the above context, this refers, specifically, to the belief of the Jews that their descent from Abraham would "ransom" them on the Day of Judgment - a belief which is refuted in the next verse.

(100) The classical commentators have indulged in much speculation as to what these commandments (*kalimat,* lit., "words") were. Since, however, the Qur'an does not specify them, it must be presumed that what is meant here is simply Abraham's complete submission to whatever commandments he received from God.

(101) This passage, read in conjuction with the two preceding verses, refutes the contention of the children of Israel that by virtue of their descent from Abraham, whom God made 'a leader of men" they are "God's chosen people". The Qur'an makes it clear that the exalted status of Abraham was not something that would automatically confer a comparable status on his physical descendants, and certainly not on the sinners among them.

(102) The Temple *(al-bayt)*-lit., "the House [of Worship]" - mentioned here is the Ka'bah in Mecca. In other places the Qur'an speaks of it as " the Ancient Temple" *(al-bayt al atiq)*, and frequently also as "the Inviolable House of Worship" *(al-masjid al-haram)*. Its prototype is said to have been built by Abraham as the first temple ever dedicated to the One God (see 3 : 96), and which for this reason has been instituted as the direction of prayer *(qiblah)* for all Muslims, and as the goal of the annually recurring pilgrimage *(hajj)*. It is to be noted that even in pre-Islamic times the Ka'bah was associated with the memory of Abraham, whose personality had always been in the foreground of Arabian thought. According to very ancient Arabian traditions, it was at the site of what later became Mecca that Abraham, in order to placate Sarah, abandoned his Egyptian bondwoman Hagar and their child Ishmael after he had brought them there from Canaan. This is by no means improbable if one bears in mind that for a camel-riding bedouin (and Abraham was certainly one) a journey of twenty or even thirty days has never been anything out of the ordinary. At first glance, the Biblical statement (Genesis xii, 14) that it was "in the wilderness of beersheba" (i.e. in the southernmost tip of Palestine) that Abraham left Hagar and Ishmael would seem to conflict with the Qur'anic account. This seeming contradiction , however, disap ears as soon as we remember that to the ancient, town-dwelling Hebrews the term "wilderness of Beersheba" comprised all the desert regions south of Palestine, including the Hijaz. It was at the place where they had been abandoned that Hagar and Ishmael, after having discovered the spring which is now called the Well of Zamzam, eventually settled; and it may have been that very spring which in time induced a wandering group of bedouin families belonging to the South-Arabian (Qahtani) tribe of Jurhum to settle there. Ishmael later married a girl of this tribe, and so became the progenitor of the *musta 'ribah* ('Arabianized") tribes - thus called on account of their descent from a Hebrew father and Qahtani mother. As for Abraham, he is said to have often visited Hagar and Ishmael: and it was on the occasion of one of these periodic visits that he, aided by Ishmael, erected the original structure of the Ka'bah. (For more detailed accounts of the Abrahamic tradition, see Bukhari's *Sahih, Kitab al-Ilm.* Tabari's *Ta' rikh al-Umam,* Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Hisham, Masudi's *Muruj adh-Dhahab,* Yaqut's *Mu'jam al-Buldan,* and other early Muslim historians.)

(103) This may refer to the immediate vicinity of the Ka'bah or, more probably (*Manar* I, 461 f.) to the sacred precincts *(haram)* surrounding it. The word amn (lit., "safety") denotes in this context a sanctuary for all living beings.

(104) The seven-fold circumambulation *(tawaf)* of the Ka'bah is one of the rites of the pilgrimage, symbolically indicating that all human actions and endeavours ought to have the idea of God and His oneness for their centre.

(105) The expression "*our* offspring" indicates Abraham's progeny through his first-born son, Ishmael, and is an indirect reference to the Prophet Muhammad, who descended from the latter.

(106) Lit., "within them".

(107) I.e., "in the religious traditions to which you adhere". It is to be noted that the conjuction *am* which stands at the beginning of this sentence is not always used in the interrogative sense ("is it that ....?"): sometimes - and especially when it is syntactically unconnected with the preceding sentence, as in this case - it is an equivalent of *al* ("rather", or "nay, but"), and has no interrogative connotation.

(108) In classical Arabic, as in ancient Hebrew usage, the term *ab* ("father") was applied not only to the direct male parent but also to grandfather and even more distant ancestors, as well as to paternal uncles: which explains why Ishmael, who was Jacob's uncle, is mentioned in this context. Since he was the first-born of Abraham's sons, his name precedes that of Issac.

(109) Lit., "you will not be asked about what they did". This verse, as well as verse 141 below, stresses the fundamental Islamic tenet of individual responsibility, and denies the Jewish idea of their being "the chosen people" by virtue of their descent, as well as - by implication - the Christian doctrine of an "original sin" with which all human beings are supposedly burdened because of Adam's fall from grace.

(110) The expression *hanif* is derived from the verb *hanafa,* which literally means "he inclined [towards a right state or tendency]" (cf. Lane II, 658). Already in pre-Islamic times, this term had a definitely monotheistic connotation, and was used to describe a man who turned away from sin and worldliness and from all dubious beliefs, especially idol-worship; and *tahannuf* denoted the ardent devotions, mainly consisting of long vigils and prayers, of the unitarian God-seekers of pre-Islamic times. Many instances of this use of the terms *hanif* and *tahannuf* occur in the verses of pre-Islamic poets, e.g., Umayyah ibn Abi 's-Salt and Jiran al- Awd (cf. *Lisan al- Arab,* art. *hanafa*).

(111) Lit., "the grandchildren" (*al-asbat*, sing. *sibt*) - a term used in the Qur'an to describe, in the first instance, Abraham's, Isaac's and Jacob's immediate descendants, and, consequently, the twelve tribes which evolved from this ancestry.

(112) I.e., "we regard them all as true prophets of God".

(113) I.e., about God's will regarding the succession of prophethood and man's ultimate salvation. The Jews believe that prophethood was a privilege granted to children of Israel alone, while the Christians maintain that Jesus - who, too, descended from the children of Israel - was God's final manifestation on earth; and each of these two denomina tions claims that salvation is reserved to its followers alone (see 2 : 111 and 135). The Qur'an refutes these ideas by stressing, in the next sentence, that God is the Lord of *all* mankind, and that every individual will be judged on the basis of his own beliefs and his own behaviour alone.

(114) Regarding the term *asbat* (rendered here as well as in verse 136 as "descendants"), see note 111 above. In the above words the Qur'an alludes to the fact that the concept of "Jewry: came into being many centuries after the time of the Patriarchs, and even long after the time of Moses, while the concepts of "Christianity" and "Christians" were unknown in Jesus' time and represent later developments.

(115) A refrence to the Biblical prediction of the coming of the Prophet Muhammad (see note33 on verse 42 of this *surah*), which effectively contradicts the Judaeo-Christian claim that all true prophets, after the Patriarchs, belonged to the children of Israel.

(116) Before his call to prophethood, and during the early Meccan period of his ministry, the Prophet - and his community with him - used to turn in prayer towards the Ka'bah. This was not prompted by any specific revelation, but was obviously due to the fact that the Ka'bah - although it had in the meantime been filled with various idols to which the pre-Islamic Arabs paid homage - was always regarded as the first temple ever dedicated to the One God (cf. 3 : 96). Since he was aware of the sanctity of Jerusalem - the other holy centre of the unitarian faith - the Prophet prayed, as a rule, before the southern wall of the Ka'bah, towards the north, so as to face both the Ka'bah and Jerusalem. After the exodus to Medina he continued to pray northwards, with only Jerusalem as his *qiblah* (direction of prayer). About sixteen months after his arrival at Medina, however, he received a revelation (verses 142-150 of this *surah*) which definitively established the Ka'bah as the *qiblah* of the followers of the Qur'an. This "abandonment" of Jerusalem obviously displeased the Jews of Medina, who must have felt gratified when they saw the Muslims praying towards their holy city; and it is to them that the opening sentence of this passage refers. If one considers the matter from the histroical point of view, there had never been any *change* in the divine commandments relating to the *qiblah:* there had simply been no ordinance whatever in this respect before verses 142-150 were revealed. Their logical connection with the preceding passages, which deal, in the main, with Abraham and his creed, lies in the fact that it was Abraham who erected the earliest structure of the temple which later came to be known as the Ka'bah.

(117) Or: "He guides onto a straight way him that wills [to be guided]".

(118) Lit., "middlemost community" -i.e., a community that keeps an equitable balance between extremes and is realistic in its appreciation of man's nature and possibilities, rejecting both licentiousness and exaggerated asceticism. In tune with its oft-repeated call to moderation in every aspect of life, the Qur'an exhorts the believers not to place too great an emphasis on the physical and material aspects of their lives, but postulates, at the same time, that man's urges and desires relating to this "life of the flesh" are God-willed and, therefore, legitimate. On further analysis, the expression "a community of the middle way" might be said to summarize, as it were, the Islamic attitude towards the problem of man's existence as such: a denial of the view that there is an inherent conflict between the spirit and the flesh, and a bold affirmation of the natural, God-willed unity in this twofold aspect of human life. This balanced attitude, peculiar to Islam, flows directly from the concept of God's oneness and, hence, of the unity of purpose underlying all His creation: and thus, the mention of the "community of the middle way" at this place is a fitting introduction to the theme of the Ka'bah, a symbol of God's oneness.

(119) I.e., "that your way of life be an example to all mankind, just as the Apostle is an example to you".

(120) I.e., "whom He has given understanding" (Razi). The "hard test" (*kabirah*) consisted in the fact that ever since their exodus to Medina the Muslims had become accustomed to praying towards Jerusalem - associated in their minds with the teachings of most of the earlier prophets mentioned in the Qur'an - and were now called upon to turn in their prayers towards the Ka'bah, which at that time (in the second year after the *hijrah*) was still used by the pagan Quraysh as a shrine deicated to the worship of their numerous idols. As against this, the Qur'an states that true believers would not find it difficult to adopt the Ka'bah once again as their *qiblah*: they would instinc tively realize the divine wisdom underlying this commandment which established Abraham's Temple as a symbol of God's oneness and a focal point of the ideological unity of Islam. (See also note 116 above.)